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ARE THE JEWS A NATION TO-DAY?

UNDER the title of "the National Idea in Judaism" in a previous issue of the *Quarterly*, Lady Magnus essays to prove "that those who would dissociate the national from the religious, or the religious from the national element in Judaism, attempt the impossible." It will be the arrogant purpose of this article to "attempt the impossible." Lady Magnus' mode of treatment is the historical. Someone has said that you can prove anything from history, and in support of that opinion, I, too, will look at the question historically, to show what different impressions the same pictures make on different minds.

I.

We find the early growth of the Jewish religion and nation so completely interwoven that it is difficult to separate the purely national from the purely religious. The Mosaic Code indiscriminately enjoins duties touching political economy, civil justice, domestic industries, local hygiene, and the Ten Commandments. Church and State were one, and it is difficult and sometimes impossible to point out just where religion left off and politics began. The earliest Jewish government was a theocracy. National conquests were treated as religious conquests—a species of Holy War, the "extermination of the heathen" being principal and the acquisition of territory subordinate. Joshua, the soldier, who made Israel a nation, was the logical successor of Moses the law-giver, who gave Israel its religion.

Eli, the judge (a sort of chieftain), was also the priest; and Samuel, the *prophet*, anointed the first *king*. King Saul was deposed on religious grounds for not putting to death Amalek, the national and hence the religious enemy. To King David is ascribed part of the early liturgy, and King Solomon builds the first Temple.

The prophets strangely intermingled ethics and politics. Their sterling appeals for righteousness constantly branched off into local government matters.

Even the Messianic idea which later became so prominent a religious doctrine in Judaism, and more especially in Christianity, was at first simply the hope for an ideal ruler—a second King David.

After the Restoration the High Priest held the temporal power. The fall of the nation seemed for the moment as though it necessarily must involve the fall of the religion; and the ninth of Ab has been observed for 1800 years as a day of *religious* humiliation.

Those who survived and did not entirely lose hope based that hope simply on the regaining of Judæa, and regarded part of their religious duties in a condition of temporary suspension. The Bar-Cochba insurrection was more than a struggle for a lost kingdom, and Rabbi Akiba's participation was consistent with the religious undercurrent of the memorable tragedy.

When that last desperate effort failed, and Hadrian made the iron enter their souls; when "Jewish disabilities" began, and it was considered a misfortune to be a Jew, then the hope of regaining Judæa became the intensest yearning of their intense natures. But as time wore on, the possibility of attaining that hope by natural means, or the course of war, became more and more visionary. Only by some supernatural intervention at some distant period could they picture the hope for restoration—only by some mighty upheaval of the universe. Only the "hand of the Lord can accomplish this thing." Thus the old hope deepened into a conviction and became a doctrine of Judaism.

When driven from city to city, and from land to land, with the mob shouting their Hep! hep! after them, their deepest consolation was that all this condition was temporary. Sooner or later the Lord would claim his peculiar people and "speedily rebuild Jerusalem." No service now entered the Ritual without the expression of this hope. "This year we are slaves, but next year we shall be free." To-day it pervades the entire orthodox liturgy, and although their complete toleration in many countries enables them to await this restoration with a good deal of equanimity, still the belief prevails that the Jews are a nation yet, still in this condition of temporary suspension, still vaguely expecting to return to Jerusalem.

II.

This brief survey might seem to favour Lady Magnus' theory that "it is impossible to dissociate the national from the religious in Judaism," and may strengthen the inference that we are yet a nation. Unfortunately for any such opinions, that complete interweaving of religion and nation is not peculiar to Jews and Judaism; it is common to all antiquity. The evidence proves too much. We might state as a general rule that national boundaries and religious boundaries were identical, and hence that there were about

as many religions as nations, and that the death of a nation generally meant the death of its religion.

Gods played as large a part in the Trojan war as men. War and peace were decided by religious oracles, and national policies were generally in the hands of the priests. Not merely Israel, but many early nationalities were theocracies. Socrates was put to death by the *civil* authorities for denying the gods of Greece. Treason was heresy, while patriotism and piety were synonymous terms. A subject's obeisance partook of religious significance, and eventually a Roman emperor became, by virtue of his position, a Roman god. When Persia overthrew Babylon, the Babylonian gods fell as a logical consequence. That the Israelites continued to observe a religion other than that of their conquerors and governors shows that the work of differentiation had commenced. For prior to this time religion as a distinct and separate institution was not only not known, it would not even have been understood.

This strong union of religion and nation is true even later than antiquity. For Christianity was accepted in Europe by nations, not by individuals, and when Protestantism was introduced, the particular creed of the princes was to decide the creed of the principality, and each of the European nations created for itself that form of Protestantism best suited to its *national* peculiarities. And prior to this time the Empire of Rome came to be identified with the realm of the Church. The theory survives to-day in the paradoxical phrase, Roman Catholic.

The history of Judaism is not more closely interwoven with that of Judæa than is the history of England with that of the English Church. Ever since the time of Henry VIII. the sovereign has been head of the Church. From that time till the reign of Queen Anne the great national question was the religious question, and then the creed of the nation was declared by Act of Parliament. Opposition to the dethronement of James II. came from the belief in the "divine right of kings." The foundation of the Irish Question has always been and always will remain a religious problem.

Thus we see that the fact that Judaism was early associated with a nationality is no reason why it need always be associated with a nationality as an integral part of itself, since that union was part of a larger truth. That our religion and nation are to-day separated is the best reply to the question whether Judaism could exist independently. We do not find it necessary to carry about with us in maturity all the appurtenances of our childhood. When manhood comes they may be hindrances instead of helps. The embodiment

of a nation may have been necessary for the growth of the religious idea. But once developed, it was able to throw aside the chrysalis coat of nationality and soar forth free.

III.

To the question then, Are we a nation to-day? I answer emphatically, No! What remnant of Jewish government and political power remained during the existence of the Second Temple was completely overthrown in the year 70. The country that Jews once owned belongs to others, and has been out of Jewish hands ever since Rome became an Empire. What has not intervened since then? Empires and nations have risen and changed hands and fallen time and again since the plough was passed over the ruins of Herod's Temple. Jews to-day are found in all countries, and are citizens in many, and in some instances they know no other, and care to know no other nation than the land of their birth. A nation forsooth, without a land, without an acknowledged government (for even the ecclesiastical chiefs are only local), without a geographical or even a linguistic unity, since Hebrew is a living tongue only to a few! Is not this harder to conceive than the farce of the Holy Roman Empire? Could the Poles to-day in Austria, Russia and Germany, call themselves a nation? And yet the partition of their land is an event comparatively of yesterday.

All people might find themselves belonging to different nationalities if they only go back to sufficiently distant ancestors. Americans are anything but Americans. The English are British as far as they are Britons, Germans to the extent that they are Saxons, and French in as far as they are Normans. It may be an interesting question to ask to what extent the past grants possession to the present. What title has a poor man to money that once was his? What title have we to Judæa by virtue of the fact that our distant ancestors in antiquity once owned that land? Are we a nation because our distant ancestors were a nation? What objection to some ghostly Roman Empire arising, and on the strength of our ancient tributary condition imposing modern procurators?

IV.

That Israel is at present a nation *de jure*, and will in the future again be a nation *de facto*, is an idea that has partly been kept alive among Israelites by Gentiles. It is, in a measure, a result of Gentile interpretation of the prophets. It is not fair either to the prophets or to the truth to attempt

to translate poetic vision into prosaic fact. The ideal pictures of a future national restoration should be treated as ideal pictures, and nothing more. But even when literally interpreted we can find later conditions in Jewish history as fulfilment of these visions. Not that we approve this method of explaining the prophets. The Jewish prophets were not oracles, or wizards, or fortune-tellers. So to read their words is to degrade them, and to deprive them of their spirituality. The Jewish prophets were zealous workers for God and righteousness; gifted with that burning eloquence that can stir whole masses. Let us hope we have long passed the time for using the Bible as a fetish-book in which to read the future. The attempt to stretch the Scriptures, in order to verify favourite dogmas, is one of the distinctions between Judaism and Christianity. "And he went down into Egypt, in order that the word might be fulfilled, And I brought my son out of Egypt," etc., etc. So we must needs think ourselves a nation, and proceed to purchase Palestine to make ourselves a nation, "in order to fulfil," etc. These puerile attempts to help out Providence would be ludicrous if they were not preposterous. Their logical consequence is mysticism. Lawrence Oliphant, the most sanguine advocate of the national theory, was, among other things, a mystic. I say that this theory has been in a measure encouraged among us by Gentiles. Emma Lazarus was fired with it by George Eliot. But George Eliot was a Positivist, and therefore did not advocate the Restoration on Biblical grounds, or by virtue of religious conviction. She saw the belief smouldering among the Jews, and thought its realisation would be a magnificent goal for a race she so much admired. Would it? This shall be our last consideration.

V.

In summing up the final consequences of this doctrine, we find that one of the results of calling the Jews a national, as well as a religious community, has been to confuse the duties and the relations of both. Some call themselves Jews because they are born Jews while repudiating all religious obligations; others remain within the fold simply by virtue of belonging to the Jewish race. Thus our fold is filled with a large number who have practically renounced our faith, who may be agnostic, perhaps even atheistic, but who claim to belong to us on the strength of the old national delusion. Thus the religious obligations of the unreflecting masses become confused and clouded, and the demoralising effect of the non-observers is felt throughout our entire ranks.

The national theory is further disadvantageous in that it keeps alive a retrogressive principle, *i.e.*, the union of Church and State. This remnant of the past is slowly dying out in most civilised countries, and those who can read the times have no doubt of the tendency. It is part of the history of the growth of religious liberty; and the complete toleration that is being gradually realised in nations having a State religion indicates the beginning of the end. As long as a particular creed is associated indissolubly with many offices of distinction and honour, just so long is religious sincerity impeded and the ideal religious condition delayed. Why, then, should we strive to keep alive a decaying principle whose merits are bound up with primitive civilisation, and in whose death lies the key to religious advancement? It is only with reference to that idea that a Goldwin Smith can find an excuse for asking the rhetorical question, "Can Jews be Patriots"?

It has another injurious influence. The confusion of the two ideas, the religious and the national, has resulted in grafting many national observances on to Judaism itself. Thus local customs have been elevated to the sanctity of religious duties, and by that very fact have degraded the really religious. Many observances, obsolete in their application and secular at best, have crept into our faith by virtue of the national doctrine, and have discredited, and in some cases concealed, the really spiritual. This is, perhaps, one of the gravest evils under which we labour to-day; and in consequence of the discouraging aspect given to our faith by this mass of ceremonial many are drifting from the fold.

Finally, it throws us open to the accusation of tribalism. As long as we shut up our religion within national boundaries, the Gentiles have a right to reproach us with striving for ourselves alone. Of all religions ours is most worthy to become universal. Its rational doctrines appeal to the most enlightened; it exceeds in breadth, liberality, and withal in simplicity, all the recognised faiths; its ethics are all-comprehensive, embracing "the whole duty of man," and its place in history entitles it to be called, not merely *a* religion, but—religion. This is, in fact, our traditional position—long ago acknowledged by all the nations—to be the teachers of religion. This, if anything, is our mission, of which we talk so much but do so little. The time has surely arrived to cut our faith loose from all political and territorial shackles, to stand forward as a religion of humanity, as such to go down to posterity, as such to decide our destiny.